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SUBJECT: NGO RE-REGISTRATION STATE-OF-PLAY AS OF OCTOBER 17

Classified By: DCM Daniel A. Russell. Reasons: 1.4 (b,d).

Summary

¶1. (U) With the October 18 NGO re-registration deadline looming, the Federal Registration Service reports that:

-- 80 NGOs have been re-registered, 42 of them U.S. NGOs;
-- 70 re-registration applications are pending;
-- only three NGOs have to date been denied re-registration.
One of them, a Turkish NGO, has re-submitted its documents.

¶2. (U) At an October 16 press conference, FRS Director Movchan elaborated the following framework for the re-registration process:

-- October 18 is the deadline for "submitting notification of an intention to re-register." NGOs not re-registered by October 18 will have as much time as necessary to provide the necessary documentation thereafter;

-- However, those NGOs not re-registered by October 18 will be allowed to engage only in "internal activity," (activities necessary to keep their offices running), while being re-registered by the FRS. Movchan's comments repudiate assertions by other senior officials that the GOR would extend the deadline to allow the full range of NGO activities to continue, and come despite DFM Yakovenko's previous comments to the Ambassador that the GOR understood the consequences of a freeze on NGO activity. In an October 17 conversation with First Deputy Foreign Minister Denisov, the Ambassador again urged that NGOs be permitted to continue activities pending re-registration. Denisov said he understood the problem. End summary.

Registration Service Director Holds Press Conference

¶3. (U) Just days before the re-registration deadline, Federal Registration Service (FRS) Director Sergey Movchan on October 16 held a press conference intended, Movchan said, to dispel myths and quell anxiety among NGOs navigating the process. Among Movchan's comments:

-- it is a "myth" that the FRS will not accept documents necessary for re-registration after October 18;

-- the FRS will not close NGOs that have not submitted all of their documents and been registered by that date;

-- it is not/not true that foreign NGOs already working in Russia but not re-registered by October 18 will be closed;

-- October 18 is the final date for submitting notification of intention to re-register. If NGOs meet that notification deadline, they will have indefinite, additional time to submit further documents deemed by the FRS necessary for re-registration;

-- until an NGO is re-registered, it will not be able to carry out program activity. It will be allowed to keep its office, pay its staff, and other bills;

-- re-registration is necessary in order to produce one, comprehensive list of all foreign NGOs working in Russia. At present, there is no such comprehensive list;

-- to date, three NGOs have been denied registration. One of them, a Turkish NGO, has re-submitted its documents;

-- to date, 80 NGOs have been re-registered;

-- of that number, 42 U.S. NGOs have completed the registration process;

-- 72 re-registration applications are currently being examined by the FRS. Forty of those are U.S. NGOs.

Re-registering U.S. Concerns with MFA

¶4. (C) In an October 17 conversation with First Deputy Foreign Minister Denisov, the Ambassador explained that Movchan's press conference contradicted private assurances by senior GOR officials that the deadline would be extended or external activities allowed to proceed. He reviewed serious

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concerns about the prospect of U.S. NGOs' external activities being frozen and noted our appreciation for DFM Yakovenko's previous commitment to look into the issue. The Ambassador noted that U.S. NGOs were moving quickly to complete their registration packets in a good faith effort to comply with the GOR requirements. Denisov said he understood the problem and would look into it further.

State-of-Play with NGOs

¶5. (U) Of the 27 NGOs USAID is tracking, as of October 16:

-- 16 have submitted applications;

-- 8 have not;

-- 3 have been registered.

¶6. (U) Among the prominent U.S. NGOs:

-- Ford Foundation has been re-registered;

-- Carnegie Endowment was re-registered on October 16;

-- NDI submitted its documents on September 27, and does not expect to hear from the FRS until October 18. It has postponed travel and programs planned both for the regions and for Moscow until re-registered. The Ombudsman's' office has told NDI to let it know, should NDI encounter difficulties with the process;

-- Amcham has been re-registered;

-- IRI submitted its documents on October 4, but has heard nothing to date from the FRS. It is prepared to put its programs on hold on October 19, if necessary;

-- Winrock International/Khabarovsk has been told by FRS it

should receive a registration certificate soon;

-- Eurasia will re-submit its amended application October 16.

¶7. (C) Other NGO developments:

-- Human Rights Watch (HRW) was called to FRS to discuss minor problems with its documents. At that meeting, the FRS representative indicated HRW's registration approval had been signed and would be filed once the minor problems were solved;

-- UN contacts have told Embassy that all NGOs working in North Caucasus except one had submitted their applications. The final NGO is expected to submit October 16. UNICEF Country Director as UN humanitarian coordinator plans to ask the MFA for assistance in expediting re-registration of humanitarian aid agencies;

-- International Rescue Committee (IRC) told Embassy it would submit its corrected application by October 18. IRC did not believe it would be forced to suspend operations, but was making contingency plans;

-- Kremlin-connected political analyst and Public Chamber member Sergey Markov told us he doubted the GOR would lift the injunction on external activities, despite Public Chamber Secretary Velikhov's written appeal. Markov attributed this

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to Kremlin disengagement on the issue, noting that repercussions in the West were not a factor that would persuade the GOR to alter course. Markov said he would himself re-raise the issue with Deputy Head of the Presidential Administration Surkov.

Life After Re-registration

¶8. (U) Post-October 18 steps for NGOs:

-- Not long after the October 18 re-registration deadline, registered NGOs are required to submit an annual report, in which they must list programs which they plan to implement in Russia in 2007. They are also required to submit quarterly financial reports. The first of those will be due October 31. At his press conference, Movchan said that any NGO failing to submit the required documents could be de-registered, but added that the FRS would work with each NGO as it navigated this new process.

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Comment

¶9. (C) The GOR has been sending mixed signals on post-October 18 operations, with FRS Director Movchan earlier assuring the Ambassador that NGOs would be able to continue operations. In meetings with the Ambassador, Human Rights Ombudsman Lukin and Presidential Administration Human Rights Chairwoman Pamfilova have also been encouraging. MFA officials, including DFM Yakovenko, have been sympathetic. At his October 16 press conference, Movchan said emphatically that unregistered NGOs would have to suspend program activity until re-registered, but was at pains to assure his audience that the FRS would aid unregistered organizations in clearing the remaining hurdles. The late filing of registration packets by some NGOs may translate into periods of forced inactivity after October 18. We will urge the expedited processing of the re-registrations, as well as encourage the GOR to be flexible in permitting NGO operations to continue.

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